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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how experienced teachers can keep their teaching fresh. Though professional development can help teachers stay current with educational techniques and practices, it is often not prioritized. Instructional changes that can recharge teachers so they provide students with optimal learning include: providing regular teacher collaboration time; offering collaborative, social experiences and extensive discussions of issues supporting teachers' change efforts; and maintaining and strengthening teachers' professionalism. Historically, professional development has been considered an isolated experience, but to meet students' changing needs, it must occur daily. Regular professional development can create a sense of community that is essential for teachers. Team meetings are one way to achieve professional development. However, art, music, foreign language, and physical education teachers are often not a part of this loop. Release time during the day is one solution to lack of time for professional development. This can happen through early dismissal or late starts or by hiring substitutes. Five ways for teachers to avoid burnout include: avoiding troublemakers, surrounding oneself with friends, balancing one's life, picking one's battles, and keeping the faith. Dialogue or discourse among peers may be one of the best ways teachers can keep their teaching fresh. (Contains 10 references.) (SM)

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# KEEPING TEACHING FRESH

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Keeping Teaching Fresh

Few will dispute the fact that the role of a teacher has changed during the last twenty years. This change is a result of changes at the national and international levels. These changes are seriously taken into consideration by some educational institution. For example, the staff of Wisconsin's Beloit College (1998) puts, together on a yearly basis, a list of information about incoming freshman class to give their faculty an idea of the mindset of new students. Last year, the following items were included on the list.

> Nationally, the people who started college in the fall of 1998 were born in 1980. They were eleven when the Soviet Union broke apart and do not remember the Cold War. Their lifetime has always included AIDS. They have never had a Polio shot, and likely do not know what it is. Most have never seen a TV set with only 13 channels, nor have they seen a black-and-white TV. Their TV sets have always had remote controls.

Such facts are common among the student population in the United States. This information is valuable to teachers because it allows them to effectively reach those learners who have had vastly different life experiences than they themselves experienced when they were the same age. As students' needs change, more demands are placed on teachers. These demands contribute to difficulties in the classroom. It is imperative for teachers to keep their practice fresh and also, perhaps more importantly, keep up with their students.

In Seattle, a survey of area public and private high school teachers reflects this national trend. Seattle teachers were asked to rank nine obstacles to effective teaching that they face in their classroom.

1. Lack of student interest and motivation
2. Students' nonacademic needs (substance abuse, homelessness, family dysfunction, etc.)
3. Class size
4. Disruptive student behavior
5. Bureaucracy (central office demands, paperwork, etc.)
6. Lack of parental involvement
7. Teacher burnout
8. Teacher pay
9. Lack of ongoing training and professional development. (Davis, 1992)

But, how do experienced teachers keep their teaching fresh, year in, year out? While, many factors contribute to teacher burnout, yet no one has a clear definition of how to keep teaching fresh, new and exciting. Teacher preparation programs are often outdated by the time a teacher enters the work force.

As Surpuriya and Jordan (1997) so aptly put it, "but no number of classroom lectures or hours on front of real students at an experienced teacher's side can adequately prepare a teacher for that day when he or she has to stand up in front to a room full of kids and try to help them learn."

It is believed that professional development is one way that can help teachers stay up to date with techniques and practices in education. Unfortunately, professional development is often at the bottom of school district's priority lists. Successful school districts place professional development at the top of their priority lists.

Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde (1998) in their book, Best Practice *New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools*, outline several steps that help school reform and more importantly, teachers. The book examines several successful schools and the process that they underwent in order to re-charge their staff so that "best practices" enhance a student's learning experiences. These instructional changes include some of the following:

1. Educators require regular time together
2. Collaborative, social experiences and extensive, open discussion of issues must support teacher's change efforts.
3. Serious reform needs authority from the top, even while the support itself emphasizes teacher's decision-making ingenuity.
4. Schools and professional development programs must maintain and strengthen teacher's concealed professionalism.

Historically, professional development has been regarded as an isolated experience often occurring on inservice or institute days. In order fo meet our students' changing needs, professional development must occur daily. Corcoran (1995) explains that teachers "need more time to work with colleagues, to critically examine the new standards being proposed, and to revise curriculum. They need opportunities to develop master, and reflect on new approaches to working with children". A sense of community that is essential for teachers may be developed if professional development is completed on a regular basis.

Patricia Austin (1998) reflects on her stage of burnout that was triggered by a feeling of isolation. She states that, "I felt alone on an island with my belief that

education is engendered by a sense of community." She realized that she had a pedagogical difference with that of her principal. She "was suddenly doing things that were anathema" to her philosophy. While the subject of at-risk students is always a hot topic, people often forget that some teachers are at-risk as well. Teachers become at-risk when their philosophies conflict with that of their school.

Where do teachers find time in their busy schedule to attend and participate in professional development? Perhaps there is no single answer to this question. Professional development and reform should be an ongoing process-one that last a lifetime. Most teachers should find ways to juggle their endless duties and participate in professional development.

One of the main ways for achieving professional development is through team meetings. Of course, team meeting are only designated for academic "core" teams. An academic "core " teams usually consist of a math teacher, a science teacher, a social studies teacher, and a language arts teacher. Together these teachers plan team activities, discuss particular student's individual needs and meet with parents. While this is a good theory, there are serious drawbacks to it. A "core" team usually only meets in class with students for half of the students' day.

Many of the other content area teachers are left on their own for professional development. Teachers representing such content areas such as art, music, foreign language and physical education are not a part of this communication loop. These teachers are often uninformed of a student's needs and they do not have the parental contact necessary to insure some student success in their particular content areas. This

type of teaming creates a hierarchy among staff and thus inhibits meaningful staff development.

Release time during the day is a viable solution to the lack of time for professional development. Release time typically may be implemented in one of two ways. First, a school district may elect to have an early dismissal or a late start on a particular day. This practice enhances the negative perception that teachers have too much time off anyway. The majority of the public perceives teachers as having too much vacation. The business sector of the public sees that the schools are released for two weeks at Christmas, spring break, and just about every state and national holiday on the calendar. Most of the time, the public perception of a teacher's summer off is that of lounging on a beach in a warmer climate. What the business sector of the public does not know, however, is that during those three months in the summer, many teachers are attending workshops, seminars, or graduate school. They also do not realize that many teachers attend graduate school, workshops, and seminars during the school year, often in the evenings or on their own weekend time.

McDiarmid (1995) explains that the second option of release time is the practice of hiring substitutes to teach while the teachers are attending professional development activities. Again, this practice fuels the public notion that a teacher is only working when the teacher is in front of students. While the restructuring of education has changed expectations for teachers, how the public and policymakers perceive teacher's work has not changed. As a result, there is little support for providing the time and resources teachers require for teachers to change their practice.

Obviously, this is a rather limited view of teaching. Unfortunately, it does not provide teachers with the opportunities to interact about such important issues as curriculum development, ways of meeting students' changing needs, and effective ways to implement standards. Again, this takes time, something teachers are always stretched to their limits to find more of.

The lack of time adds to the daily stress of teaching. One obvious way for teachers to have more time for professional development during the day is the hiring of substitutes. Again, this practice, from a teacher's standpoint, takes additional time for the classroom teacher. The preparation of daily lesson plans is often a monotonous task. Many teachers fret about the quality of the lessons being taught in their absence.

Another viable attempt to provide teachers with additional time for professional development is to alter the school day by either starting late or ending the day early. While in theory this might be considered a viable option, many factors inhibit this practice. In today's society, many families have dual incomes. Childcare becomes an issue for many when the school day is altered. This practice could in fact have negative impact on the public's opinion of professional development. In order for professional development to be successful, it is vital to be aware of parent opinion. Parents need to understand the value of professional development and the impact that professional development has on instruction. A strong partnership with both parents and the community only strengthens the learning environment for the student population.

Professional development does not have to be formal per se'. Teachers find solace among colleagues. Some of the more informal ways that teachers may bond professionally, relieve some stress, and help prevent burnout are very easily

accomplished. The Early Childhood Educators website (1999) offers these five ways to prevent burnout.

1. Stay Clear of Troublemakers: Identify negative people and situations. They have a tendency to waste your time and energy.
2. Surround Yourself With Friends: Friendship is a powerful vehicle. Friends both advise and listen.
3. Balance Your Life: Teachers give to others. Often, teachers are parents, a spouse and a friend. That, too, requires giving of you. Take time for yourself. Get rejuvenated.
4. Pick your Battles: Choose important issues. Leave the rest for later.
5. Keep the Faith: Teaching requires a vision to see the difference you make in the life of a child. It requires faith to realize that what you do truly matters.

Zemelman, et al., 1998 explain that perhaps, as trite as it may sound, dialogue or discourse among peers is one of the best ways that teachers may keep their teaching fresh. Ideas are bounced off of peers. Teachers gain confidence in their proposals after they have had a chance to get feedback from their peers. Teachers reflect. Teachers glean new ideas from each other. Eliminating the hierarchy of leaders within a school and regarding the school as more of a community effectively achieves this. We encourage cooperative learning among our students. What better place to start than with ourselves?

In summary, it is believed that the best way to keep teaching fresh is to constantly change. Reflect. Introspection or reflection is an exchange that leads us down entangled roads to consider larger issues. While change is not always comfortable, it does help

motivate both students and teachers. Good teachers implement change in order to keep their practice fresh. Good teachers recognize the needs of their learners and change according to those needs. Teachers concerned with meeting their students' needs and feeling as if they are part of a learning community are less apt to become another attrition statistic. (Austin, 1998)

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